

News Release

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Efforts to Protect Piping Plover and Other Beach Nesters Include Temporary Closure of ORV Zone

Many visitors who frequent Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge this time of year will not be surprised to hear about temporary beach closures that occur seasonally within the Off Road Vehicle (ORV) zone. Quite frankly, it's another sign that summer has arrived marking the beginning of the high tourist and another busy nesting season.

Here on the southern end of Assateague Island, off-road vehicle use is allowed on a small section of the beach for visitors who have obtained the proper permits. This enhances their ability to participate in surf fishing which is an increasingly popular activity on the refuge. The incremental closure of public access to this small area is necessary to protect the piping plover and other migratory shorebirds. However, in the fall, the beach will reopen to public access after all young birds are able to fly.

"The needs of wildlife come first on all wildlife refuges," stated Refuge Manager Lou Hinds. "On Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, piping plover management dictates that we protect these threatened shorebirds during the breeding season." This temporary closure is required by the Biological Opinion completed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2001. The document outlines the parameters to manage piping plovers and other uses on the refuge.

The Hook and Overwash areas of Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge abound with prime sites for a variety of beach nesters. Currently there are approximately 18 pairs of piping plovers, a species listed as threatened since 1986, 14 pairs of American oystercatchers and nesting colonies of forsters and least terns as well as black skimmers. Shorebirds such as red knots, ruddy turnstones, and a variety of sandpipers use this area as a critical feeding and staging area during their long distance migrations.

Other wildlife species also need access to undisturbed shoreline in order to survive. In recent years an increase in sea turtle nesting has also been noted in these areas, with a total of 8 turtle crawls recorded in the last year alone.

The refuge, having been designated a Globally Important Bird Area, is a part of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network and designated as one of the top ten birding hotspots by the National Audubon Society. The primary mission of Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge is to protect migratory birds and other native wildlife as well as the habitats they depend upon. When compatible with the needs of wildlife, the refuge accommodates wildlife-dependant recreation.

"I believe these measures, coupled with the continued cooperation of the community and our visitors, will ensure the future success of piping plovers in Virginia and will help achieve the goal of increasing the overall population," says Hinds. Refuge staff will monitor the area to make any necessary adjustments to the closure.

For more information, please contact the refuge at 757-336-6122.

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